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The Office and Purpose of the Organ in our Churches.*

Praise the Lord with timbrel and
choir; praise him with strings and
organ. Ps. 150, 4.

A rare occasion has assembled us here this evening, as rare indeed as it is joyful. We have come together to dedicate a new organ, and centuries may pass before the parish will have occasion to celebrate a like event. By the religious rites with which the service this evening was opened the new organ has been withdrawn from profane use and placed entirely in the service of the most High.

It would be interesting to trace the history of the organ and to show you how, in the course of many centuries, it passed through different stages of development, until it attained that exquisite perfection which today characterizes the king of instruments; it would be also highly instructive to see how the church, always alert to protect and foster true art and to make it serve the sublime ends of religion, early granted domicile to the organ as at once to the most artistic and becoming instrument for divine service. So closely and exclusively has the organ become allied with divine service that a church without an organ strikes us like a man without speech. I prefer, however, to stress the practical and to speak to you this evening on the office and purpose of the organ in our churches.

Music, both vocal and instrumental, is a living art and is founded on the laws of beauty; but all beauty has its prototype in God, who is Beauty Absolute. Therefore, music is rightly termed a daughter of Heaven, and Heaven itself is replete with music. With the eye of faith we behold the throne of the infinite God in Heaven surrounded by a countless throng of angels. "They labor not, neither do they spin," they are not engaged in politics or uplift, yet day and night they are busy; their incessant occupation is to sing: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts." For all eternity these holy spirits sing the praises of God.

The inspired word also informs us that when God was born into this world a host of angels attended, not to offer Him earthly comforts, but to sing the praise of God. Angels were sent to men as divine messengers, yet nowhere do we read that they clothed their messages in the garb of song; but the praises of God are sung to the shepherds, not by one angel, but by "a multitude of the heavenly army" (Lc 2, 13.).

Again, the inspired world tells us that among the saints in Heaven one particular class, the pure, "follows the Lamb whithersoever it goeth and sings a new canticle that no other man can sing." (Apoc. 14, 3-4). Since these are represented as singing a special song, the implication is that the rest also sing, and from this it follows that our occupation in the hereafter is intended to be, like that of the angels, to sing forever the praises of God.

But our occupation in this life is properly also to seek and sing God's praise. Being equipped by the Creator with faculties that merit for us a place "a little below the angels," and endowed with a pronounced sense for the beautiful and the true, could we have a calling more noble and sublime? Aye, it behooves men more than the angels to sing God's praises, for He deserves more praise from men than from the angels. God did not assume the nature of an angel, neither did He redeem an angel; but He did take to Himself a human nature and suffered and died to redeem men. He dwells among us not as an angel but as God-man. Have we then not better reason to sing His praise than the angels?

God, however, is not content with the praise of angels and men; the inanimate, the brute creation also joins in His praise. "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands; day to day uttereth speech, and night to night sheweth knowledge" (Ps. 18); i. e. the praise of God's omnipotence and wisdom resounds incessantly in nature. In the book of Daniel and throughout the psalms all creation is called upon to extol and glorify God. The poet even speaks of the "music of the spheres" hinting, what is not at all impossible, that the entire universe, earth, sun, moon, and stars, in their rapid flight through space produce one grand, magnificent chorus of music, glorifying God the Lord and Maker of all.

*Address delivered April 30, 1922, at the dedication of a new organ at the St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Waterford, Wis., by the Rev. Jos. J. Pierron, Rector of Pio Nono College, St. Francis, Wis.

The royal psalmist demands that God's praise be sounded with all manner of musical instrument. He says: "Praise him with sound of trumpet: praise him with psaltery and harp. Praise him with timbrel and choir: praise him with strings and organs. Praise him on high sounding cymbals: praise him on cymbals of joy" (Ps. 150). Now, the organ is practically a combination of all man-made instruments, and the three great kingdoms in nature, the mineral, vegetable, and animal are made to contribute towards its manufacture. Therefore, all nature is, so to speak, represented in the organ.

But St. Paul assures us that "creation also itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption into the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8, 21). That means that all creation will experience at the end of the world a change similar to that which will render glorious the elect, the children of God. How eminently fitting, therefore, that the organ should occupy a place of honor in the church, that through it the whole earth may also share in the service, the worship, and praises of the children of God!

The organ is most intimately united with divine service. Its solemn tones accompany the priest to the altar; its rounded harmonies weave themselves around the sacrificial act; its sublime and mellow sweetness betokens the hallowed presence of our eucharistic God.

It is urged that the organ, lacking in sentimental expressiveness, cannot stir the emotions and arouse the passion like some of the simpler instruments. True, but this apparent defect becomes a positive gain in its use as a liturgical instrument; for while the organ cannot produce such highly impassioned effects, its noble and dignified sound, its smooth, uniform, and pure tone give it a greater appeal to the finer emotions, and are all the more productive of genuine, chaste devotion.

The organ is intended to accompany and sustain the singing of choir and congregation. Through the liturgical chant the people take an active part in the liturgical rites. Liturgical song, therefore, is one of the chief elements of public worship, and it is only natural that we should find it everywhere associated with public sacred functions. But, as social life in the family and in the church can thrive only when led and controlled by one dominating influence, which checks confusion and corrects dissonances, so liturgical song needs a unifying and directing force to avoid what might offend the sensibilities of the worshippers, and to insure that elevating effect which liturgical song ought

to produce on susceptible, Christian hearts. The organ supplies in admirable manner this unifying element.

With its soothing and jubilant harmonies the organ is intended to make us forget, at least for the time being, the cares and worries of everyday life. It offers us relief and comfort after a week of toil and labor. Its dulcet notes, its majestic chorus gladden the heart of man and elevate his mind, often the plain and poor man's welcome substitute for the expensive and elaborate diversions of the rich.

By its beautiful harmony the organ is the symbol of a Christian congregation whose members ought to be united by the bond of genuine charity. A noted author of travel once wrote: "If I want to learn the religious, cultural, and moral conditions of a place, I go to its church. If the church is clean and beautifully decorated and if the sound of a beautiful organ is swelled by the harmonious song of the congregation, then I am in the company of good people; but if its music and religious song make a poor and neglected impression, then I judge the congregation accordingly and I have rarely been deceived." In the parish church one feels the pulse beat of the people.

That is, briefly stated, the office and purpose of the organ in our churches. I congratulate your good and zealous pastor and all the members of the parish upon the fine success of their efforts. You may be justly proud of the splendid acquisition to your beautiful church and may the good God reward a hundredfold all those who contributed towards its realization.

May the new organ add embellishment and vigor to your hymns of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. Recognize in it the voice of creation and let it spur you on to render ever increasing tribute to the most High, and to kindle you with a more filial attachment to the Father above. May its soothing strains lighten your daily cares and worries; may its swelling chorus fill you with new hope and a burning desire for the glad, eternal song of the new Jerusalem.

May it symbolize peace, concord, and Christian charity in your hearts, in your families, in your parish; may it be to coming generations a testimony of your faith and spirit of sacrifice. May it never be profaned by unholy hands or by performances unworthy of its sublime purpose. Joined with your ready and joyous song may it add luster to your liturgical and religious celebrations and be a source of blessing for time and eternity. Amen.

Music, a Message.

Music is a message. When you play or sing, it is your duty to convey a message to your hearers. The message is there in the music. The composer wrote it in his work, and committed it to you to deliver it.

It is a high duty, this delivering of a message to those who are waiting. First, you must seek; then you must make it your own; third, you must find the means to deliver it with truth and impressiveness.

When you come to think of it, the executant is the great factor in giving out a musical message. He must have technic that his delivery of the message may be clear and intelligent; he must have intelligence that can grasp the character and importance of the message. And finally he must have sensibility that he may make the message his own, and give it out again warmed by his sympathy and love for his fellows.

It is said of a worthy old verger in an English cathedral that on one occasion he delivered himself of the following criticism of a certain class of singers: "It ain't them that nods and smiles like that sings the best. What I says is, if you don't feel nothink, why it ain't nothink."

Let us have technic in our singing (and playing), let us have understanding, intelligence, brains, but, above all, let us have sensibility to warm and make truly human our message of music. —*The Musician*.

On Bad Taste in Organ-Playing.

"Organ-playing," writes Mr. Filson Young in the *Saturday Review*, "is too often like preaching; the circumstances make it difficult or impossible for the hearer to go away; he is obliged to sit and listen to strains which may be grandiloquent without being grand, and pompous without being dignified. The true organ tone is essentially monotonous, and the purer it is, the more apt is the monotony to weary and depress the ear. The whole genius of the instrument is grave and philosophic; it is incapable of any but momentary excursions into a lighter vein; and the lightest error of taste verges on the indecent, and is shocking to all sense of seemliness. . . . It is not merely the ear that is affronted by bad taste in organ-playing; a sense of shame afflicts you, a kind of embarrassment such as is associated with all outrages upon proportion.

For even a poor organ is the work of many master craftsmen and represents in a high degree the perfection attainable in things wrought by the hand of man. Serious thought and consideration have gone to the proportions of metal to be used in the pipes; the finest woods, sunned and seasoned in many climes, have been fashioned and joined by the most skillful woodworkers; and from the pipe thirty feet high, whose soft muttering shakes the building, to the minute little metal tube an inch long that is the topmost branch of the great tree of sound, all have been subject on the voicer's bench to the minute manipulations that determine their character and bring thousands of them together within the scope of one tonal conception. To place all this at the mercy of some clumsy hobbledehoy or ignorant spinster, and to have its noble possibilities explored and exploited by untrained and insensible fingers, is to sin in a high degree against artistic proportion.

Unfortunately, with us the church is almost the only endowment for the organ, and churches, as a rule, cannot afford to pay the organist a salary which will command the services of a man or woman of superior taste and talent. There is little or no personal glory in the business, and the fees and bouquets awarded to the platform performer are not for the organist, who is either invisible, or presents only a pair of laboring shoulders to his audience. These conditions, it is true, eliminate many of the unworthy and leave to the real musician a field of true if lonely devotion. And the organist who is really a musician is usually a very fine one."

"Begleitung des Volksgesanges."

Zum richtigen schönen Vortrage des Volksgesanges ist es von grösster Wichtigkeit, dass der Organist diese Gesänge in würdiger und verständnisvoller Weise begleite.

1. Der Organist begleite den Volksgesang in der Regel nach einer guten Vorlage.

Die Harmonisierung soll ja stets der Melodie entsprechen, sie soll derselben angepasst sein, und dies verlangt daher mitunter eine ganz bedeutende Kenntnis der Harmonielehre und einen gewissen künstlerischen Geschmack, zwei Dinge, die vielleicht in seltenen Fällen sich zusammen finden oder nach Wunsch allwegs sogleich parieren. Und besonders gilt das, wenn die Melodie einer Kirchentonart angehört.

Die Benützung einer guten Vorlage ist aber heutzutage sehr leicht gemacht, indem wohl alle besseren Kirchenlieder ihre eigene Orgelbegleitung haben, die doch durchschnittlich von kundiger Hand zusammengestellt ist.

2. Der Organist trachtet darnach, bei seinen Vor- und Zwischenspielen möglichst die Stileinheit zu wahren.

Das Vorspiel (Zwischenspiel) soll in gleicher Tonart, gleicher Taktart, im nämlichen Charakter und mit denselben oder sehr verwandten Motiven auftreten, wie das darauffolgende Gesangsstück.

Es trägt zu einem korrekten schönen Einsatz der Sänger ungemein viel bei, wenn das Vorspiel auf die Melodie des Liedes wenigstens in irgend einer Art deutlich hinweist.

In vielen "Orgelbüchern" ist ohnehin durch entsprechende Vor- und Zwischenspiele eigens auf diesen Umstand Rücksicht genommen.

Auf jeden Fall kann aber ein Organist die ersten Takte der Melodie mit einer passenden Schlusskadenz verwenden und auf diese Weise wenigstens einigermaßen den Zusammenhang vermitteln.

3. Die Registrierung stehe zur Stärke des Gesanges im richtigen Verhältnisse.

Die Orgel darf einerseits nie so stark gespielt werden, dass sie die Sänger zum Schreien veranlasst (daher keine Mixturen) oder ihre Stimmen ganz verdeckt (daher nicht gar zu dumpfe Holzregister), andererseits aber soll sie doch jene Kraft und Bestimmtheit des Tones besitzen, welche notwendig ist, um die Melodie und Harmonie des Liedes vollständig zur Geltung zu bringen und die Sänger vor dem Detonieren (aus dem Tone fallen, sinken) zu schützen.

In den meisten Fällen wird daher die Zugabe eines 4' (mitunter sogar eines 2') die Begleitung verstärken müssen. In dieser Hinsicht gilt so recht die Mahnung zum goldenen Mittelmasse.

Wie es ein ungemein drückendes und beängstigendes Gefühl verursacht, wenn ein Organist den Volksgesang mit voller Orgel begleitet, ebenso (vielleicht noch mehr) unangenehm wirkt eine allzuschwache, unbestimmte, unsichere Begleitung.

Wir möchten jedem Organisten raten, sich das Ding wo möglich selber unten in der Kirche anzuhören und darnach seine eigene Registrierung einzurichten.

4. Die Orgelbegleitung soll den Volksgesang tragen und stützen.

Von diesem Standpunkte aus ist es vor allem notwendig, dass der Organist nicht planlos und rücksichtslos seine Noten abspielt, sondern trachtet, dass Orgel und Gesang möglichst genau zusammentreffen.

Gewiss, die Orgelbegleitung kann und soll den Vortrag gewissermaßen regulieren, aber das darf niemals so geschehen, dass darüber eine Unordnung entsteht.

Der Organist—so bemerkt Fr. Könen—achte darauf, am Ende der Verszeilen die Ruhepunkte nicht zu lange auszudehnen und dort, wo keine Ruhepunkte verzeichnet sind, ohne Zögern weiter zu drängen. Bei den Ruhepunkten wolle er die Hände vom Manual abheben und den Basston aushalten; dadurch werden die Absätze genügend hervorgehoben, ohne dass ein gänzlichliches Aufhören des Orgeltones stattfindet. Verbindende Überleitungen zwischen den einzelnen Melodiesätzen sollen nie gemacht werden; sie zerreißen den Zusammenhang der Melodie.

5. Korrekturen im Volksgesange nehme der Organist nicht während des Gottesdienstes vor.

Man hat mitunter Gelegenheit zu hören, wie einzelne Organisten das Schreien, Vorgreifen, Verschleppen der Sänger mit einer gewissen auffälligen Gewalt während des Gottesdienstes abstellen wollen, natürlich meistens ohne Erfolg. Es ist diese Manier für den Zuhörer ungemein peinlich und für die Kirche geradezu unwürdig.

Wenn schon Missstände sich ergeben, so sollen dieselben doch in der Regel bei einer anderen Gelegenheit gerügt und beseitigt werden, denn das Singen beim Gottesdienste darf keine Musikprobe werden.

Das sind nur einige Grundsätze über die Begleitung des Volksgesanges, doch wir sind überzeugt, dass auch schon die Befolgung dieser viel beitragen kann, um den richtigen Volksgesang zu heben und zu fördern.—

Miscellany.

Pater Abraham a Santa Clara urtheilte über schlechte Musiker seinerzeit folgendermassen: "In euren Orchestern, ihr Leute, wird so arg geschwätzt, dass sie keine Ohrchester, sondern Maulchester sind; die Violinen sind Vieh-olinen, die Klarinett ist weder klar noch nett; die Flöten sind in Nöten, die Hoboen sind tiefe Boen, die Hörner würden euch besser vor der Stirn stehen als am Munde. Genug, alle Musikanten spielen ihre Schande, das Notenpult allein ist ohne Schuld und euer Director ist ein Tier-Rector.

